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Washington, DC 20515-3819

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June 25, 1997

Mr. Dennis Rathbun
Director of Congressional Affairs
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852-2738

Dear Mr. Rathbun:

The attached communication sent to me by Jane Lee has been respectfully referred to you for your review, consideration, and comment.

I ask that you kindly return the enclosed correspondence to Tom Davidson of my staff.

Please mail response to:
Congressman Bill Goodling
2020 Yale Avenue
Camp Hill, PA 17011

If you have any questions, concerning this inquiry, please contact at 717-782-4526.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

BILL GOODLING
Member of Congress

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Nuclear power

TMI rod failure during shutdown generates worry

Radiation levels did not increase around the plant

BY TERESA CANDORI
OF THE PATRIOT-NEWS

The company that operates the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant said yesterday that Saturday's shutdown caused no detectable increase in radiation levels around the plant.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission agrees.

And a watchdog group that monitors radiation levels said a momentary spike at one monitoring station a mile from the plant might be meaningless.

But of more concern to the plant operators and federal overseers is that three of the 69 control rods which effect an emergency shutdown did not operate properly.

The plant remains shut down while inspectors evaluate the problems that caused the loss of incoming power which tripped the automatic shutdown. At least one national network yesterday reported that "radioactive" steam had been released from the plant. But the steam was no more radioactive than the steam released every time the plant shuts down, according to TMI and the NRC, and did not increase radiation levels around the plant.

See TMI / Page B2

TMI/Control rod malfunctions cause worry

From Page B1

The white mist that can be seen billowing from the plant's cooling towers when the plant is in operation is not steam, but rather condensation formed when the heat rising from the tower hits the cooler air.

Steam and gasses are released whenever a nuclear reactor shuts down because the generator operates under pressure, and the pressure must be released to cool down the reactor. TMI last shut down its reactor in the fall of 1995.

Laura Karinch, spokeswoman for GPU Nuclear, which operates TMI, called yesterday's NBC News report "a shame." A statement she issued Saturday after the plant declared the incident an "unusual event" indicated that the steam contained "trace amounts" of radioactivity.

"People aren't used to the idea that a lot of things around them are radioactive," she said, "like the bricks in your home, your own body, radiation from the sun, radiation from the earth."

An "unusual event" is the low-

est emergency category used in the nuclear power industry. TMI has declared an unusual event four times in the last seven years, according to Karinch.

According to plant officials, here's what happened Saturday: The generator shut down automatically at 12:14 p.m. after a loss of incoming power. The loss of power was caused by a failure in a circuit breaker at TMI's on-site substation. Power was restored at 1:44 p.m., and the plant remained in unusual event status until 9:24 p.m., when normal cooling methods were restored.

Bill Whitock, who lives in Goldsboro about a mile from the plant, said he heard a loud noise and noticed steam coming from the generator building and black smoke rising from the island. Karinch said the noise was from the steam escaping, and the black smoke was from the plant's diesel-powered emergency backup generators kicking on.

But the noise, steam and smoke prompted Whitock to check a radiation detection device on his property, which is part of a system monitored by

the watchdog group TMI Citizens Monitoring Network.

Whitock said the device measured 50 counts — or clicks — per minute when the normal level is 10 counts per minute.

But Deborah Davenport, a citizen who monitors radiation levels on both the system maintained by TMI and the citizen group's, said the monthly level at Whitock's site has been around 35 counts per minute, with a maximum of 65.

TMI's own monitoring system measures radiation in millirems per hour — 0.007 per hour is normal background radiation — and it's complicated to compare the two measurements because the conversion rate is different for different sources of radiation. Levels above 75 counts per minute would trigger an alarm on the citizen group's system.

"One reading of 50 counts per minute doesn't mean anything," said Davenport, who is on the board of directors for TMI Citizens Monitoring Network. "That little spike could be something, but it is very small."

She said the readings will have to be analyzed along with

reports from other monitoring sites before any conclusion can be drawn.

Neil Sheehan, spokesman for the NRC, said a Commission inspector was onsite during the incident Saturday, and he confirmed there was no measurable increase in radiation levels around the plant.

Sheehan said the malfunction of the control rods, however, is a cause for concern.

"It's something they need to work on," he said. The rods, which are inserted to stop the fission process in the reactor's nuclear core, are supposed to insert in 1.66 seconds or less, according to GPU Nuclear. Three of the rods took up to a half-second longer to insert.

"Even a half-second is important," Sheehan said. "Whenever you need to shut down the plant in a hurry they need to insert as quickly as they're supposed to. Every second counts. They've got to be very stringent."

The control rod problem has surfaced several times over the last 10 years. Karinch said the control rods will be tested before the plant restarts.

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3819

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Mr. Dennis Rathbun
Director of Congressional Affairs
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852-2738



20852-2738 13



Rep. Goodling Constituent Service Form

Please print all information and return by folding this form in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope. Make sure you affix postage to the envelope. If you have any questions, please call one of the numbers listed below.

Name: Jane Lee

Address: 183 Valley Road

City/State/Zip: Etters PA

Phone Number: (Home) 717-938-6628 (Work) _____

Social Security Number: _____

Other identifying or claim numbers: _____

Federal Agency with which you have a problem: Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Please describe your problem briefly: Concerned that local NRC officials are not properly monitoring most recent unusual incident reported at Three Mile Island on 21 June 1995. Believes that event is much more severe than originally reported. See attached media report.

What would you like Congressman Goodling to do to help? Contact NRC and request independent investigation of the incident. Obtain written response of findings.

Your signature please: via phone on 23 June 1997

Date: 25 June 1997

If there are any letters or other material that you think we should have, please send copies to our nearest office. Thank you.

Congressman Bill Goodling District Offices

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